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Old Ways of Playing

FAR more has been written about sport in the last hundred or so years than about the period from the early eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century. 'Modern' sport according to received wisdom was invented in the mid-Victorian years—the 1850s to 1880s—and everything that preceded this 'revolution' was 'traditional'. Furthermore it has often been suggested that there was a gap, a 'vacuum', between the decline of ancient forms of play and the spread of new ones. The attack on cruel sports, interference in street games, and sabbatarianism have combined to create an image of a gloomy and work-dominated world of factory and slum. But is this a true picture? Without seeking to devalue the impact of either the public school system or the progress of industrialization, it is important to see that major changes were already underway before the Victorians. It is misleading to think of popular culture from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries solely in terms of a decline of ancient amusements. This perspective has been handed down to us via the folklorists of the late nineteenth century, who took an interest in traditional games along with folk-songs, old wives' tales, and herbal potions. Living as they did in the midst of an unprecedented upsurge of urban and industrial change, it is hardly surprising that they tended to see the pre-Victorian world as a haven of ancient custom. Yet the power of an orally transmitted popular culture has to be set alongside the distinct changes in regulation and commercial organization that were also taking place. The interplay of change and continuity, persistence in some things and innovation in others, is too complex to be slotted neatly into a simple 'modernization' model. As we shall see, the early nineteenth century was less unambiguously 'traditional' and the late nineteenth century less 'modern' than first appearances might suggest.

1. BEFORE THE VICTORIANS

A remarkable range of popular games and contests was played and enjoyed in Britain before the advent of modern sports. Each town or village had its ball games, running races, and varieties of fighting and animal sports. An observer of early eighteenth-century London noted that the 'more common sort divert themselves at football, wrestling, cudgels, ninepins, shovel-board, cricket, stow-ball, ringing of bells, quoits, pitching the bar, bull and bear baiting, throwing at cocks'; and even the most cursory glance at Strutt's classic survey of *The Sports and Pastimes of the People of England* (1801) would further extend the list. For the most part there were no national games in the modern sense, although the Cotswold Games, revived by Robert Dover in 1604, attracted huge crowds to watch contests of leaping, shin-kicking, wrestling as well as coursing and jousting. These games survived into the mid-nineteenth century on 'Dover's Hill' near Chipping Camden as a kind of proto-national event. Yet most people still played only amongst themselves or with a neighbouring parish and had no need of written codes of practice. The young grew up playing the game in the way their elders had done and in turn passed on these traditions to their children.[1]

It is often incorrectly assumed that traditional games were childish or primitive. Richard Carew's *Survey of Cornwall* in 1603 gives one of the most detailed descriptions we have of a game of football, or hurling as it was called in Cornwall, which reveals complex rules and strategies for deceiving the opposition. In the east of Cornwall 'hurling to goales' involved teams of 15, 20, or 30 in which each player paired himself with another from the opposing team and attempted to block his advance, as in American football today. 'The Hurlers are bound to the observation of many lawes, as that they must hurle man to man, and not two set upon one man at once: the Hurler against the ball, must not butt, nor handfast under the girdle: that he who hath the ball, must butt onely in the others brest.' There was even an offside rule: 'that he must deal no Fore-ball, viz. he may not

[1] R. W. Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society 1700–1850* (1979), p. 34; Malcolmson provides a concise and indispensable introduction to traditional forms of popular sport.

throw it to any of his mates, standinge nearer the goale than himselfe.' Similarly an early eighteenth-century account of the Norfolk variant of traditional football called 'camping' notes that 'if caught or held, or in imminent danger of being caught, he *throws* the ball—he must in no case *give* it—to a less beleaguered friend, who . . . catches it and hastens homeward, in like manner pursued, annoyed and aided—winning the notch [or snotch] if he contrives to *carry* it—not *throw*—it between his goales'. These games were not just the contests of brute strength and collective violence that they were assumed to have been by the inventors of 'new' games in the mid-nineteenth century. As the observer of the Norfolk game remarks, if the teams were well matched—and the idea of balancing up sides carefully in itself assumes a fairly sophisticated concept of play—the scoring of a goal 'is no easy achievement, and often requires much time, many doublings, detours and exertions'.[2]

Although traditional sports were not necessarily crude, they did differ in important respects from our contemporary forms of play. Sports tended to be considered not in isolation but as integral parts of a wider pattern of amusement. The 'wakes', annual holidays in honour of the patron saint of the parish, were very widely observed as a kind of English equivalent of the Catholic festivities before Lent, involving the election of captains of youth to lead the revels. There were also numerous Shrove-tide games directly linked to the traditions of the European Carnival in which the bachelors of around fifteen to twenty-five would assert their right of 'misrule' against those with the right to procreate, and often against the wider social and spiritual hierarchy as well. The May Day revels in Lincolnshire in the late sixteenth century involved assembling the male youth of the parish and electing a 'Lord of Misrule', who was anointed and crowned in an explicit parody of kingship. 'Then march this heathen company towards the church and churchyard, their pipers piping, their drummers thundering, their stumps dancing, their bells jingling, their handkerchieves swinging about their heads like madman,' complained a Puritan critic of these customs.

[2] Carew cited in N. Elias and E. Dunning, 'Folk Football in Medieval and Early Modern Britain', in E. Dunning (ed.), *The Sociology of Sport* (1970), pp. 126–9; Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations*, pp. 35–6.

They distributed badges to those who donated money for the revels, but those who did not approve of their 'devilish cognizances' and 'would not be buxom to them' were 'mocked and flouted at not a little'.[3]

This conflict between the married and unmarried was a very important part of the festive life of a society where individual wishes in matrimony and sexual relationships generally were far more subject to parental and community sanction than they are today. This division between 'young' and 'old' was embedded in the structure of artisan employment with apprentices working for set periods of their lives regardless of their actual skill in the work and being unable to marry until they had served their time. Sports, especially football, often embodied these divisions. The Freemen Marblers of Corfe Castle initiated their apprentices on Shrove Tuesday. Those who had married in the previous year paid for the feast and arranged the football that customarily took place the following day, Ash Wednesday; the game was played over the land that the company claimed for their special use upon the payment of a pound of pepper to the lord of the manor. So the football match was firmly rooted in the deeper structure of that small society, linking the work and rights of the guild with the relationships between masters and men, and those between the married and the unmarried. The game not only confirmed the customary rights of way by playing over the land itself, it helped to denote how that community of quarrymen was itself to be ordered. Sport, of course, is among other things an ancient display of prowess, and no doubt the young men of Corfe hoped to make themselves more attractive to the limited pool of marriageable girls by the display of bodily vigour. Certain sports had a similar significance for girls, and popular festivities often included races for women as well as for men. 'Nothing is more usual than for a nimble-footed wench to get a husband at the same time as she wins a smock,' observed Addison of the wakes at Bath in the early eighteenth century.[4]

Traditional sports were rooted in the territorial as well as in the conjugal order. During the seasonal pattern of amusements

[3] J. R. Gillis, *Youth and History* (1981), p. 27.

[4] Elias and Dunning, 'Folk Football', p. 124; P. Lovesey, *The Official Centenary History of the Amateur Athletic Association* (1979), p. 14.

that reached their height between spring sowing and summer harvesting and in the dead months of midwinter, the young not only organized themselves for mating and for work, they asserted the identity of each generation of village inhabitants. Deep attachment to the land and a fierce local patriotism were part and parcel of popular recreations. Inter-parish fights were commonplace throughout early modern Europe and were usually carefully regulated by custom. Football was often a good way of permitting the youth their violent rituals; the ancient match between the parishes of Saint Peter's and All Saints in Derby at Shrove-tide is a case in point. Solidarity may have existed within villages but peace rarely prevailed between them. A writer to the *Spectator* in the early eighteenth century, remarking upon the ferocity of these local antagonisms, claimed 'my tenant in the country is verily persuaded that the parish of the enemy hath not one honest man in it'. George Owen's *Description of Pembrokeshire* (1603) noted that those who played village football (*cnappen* in Welsh) 'contend not for any wager or valuable thing but strive to the death for glory and fame which they esteem dearer than any worldly wealth'. In the old traditions of carnival there would also be mummers dressing up and putting on farces to mock the pretensions of the clergy or unpopular local bigwigs. Amid the fighting and mockery, the eating and drinking, there would be weird and wonderful events often revealing humanity at its most hilarious and absurd. At the Halshaw Wakes near Bolton eager contestants were stripping the wicks from a pound of candles with their teeth and eating scalding porridge with their fingers well into the nineteenth century. There were greasy poles, greasy pigs, goose-rides, grinning or grimacing ('gurning') matches, and dozens more of what 'rational' or puritan critics considered to be daft or demeaning amusements.[5]

There were also numerous contests involving the killing or baiting of animals. These were a particular feature of the sports associated with major seasonal festivities. In the country they were occasional treats rather than regular weekly events because of the expense involved. Throwing at cocks was a favourite sport

[5] R. W. Malcolmson, 'Sports in Society', *BJSH*, May 1984, p. 63; D. Smith and G. Williams, *Fields of Praise* (1980), p. 18; P. Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England* (1978), pp. 21–2.

on Shrove Tuesday. The bird was tethered by a string a few feet long and passers-by paid to throw stones or sticks at what was a living coconut shy. The bird would dodge as best it could until its legs were broken and it was finally killed. The creature was then carried off in triumph by the thrower that had finished it off. Cock-fighting was even more popular. Schoolboys traditionally brought their cocks to school on Shrove Tuesday to match them. All large towns had cockpits, and here contests were more regular. Pepys went to one in London in 1663 and found 'the poorest prentices, bakers, brewers, butchers, draymen and whatnot . . . all fellows one with another swearing, cursing and betting'. In eighteenth-century Newcastle, in spite of the high admission charges cockfights were always crowded by 'eager and interested pitmen', and there were at least seven cockpits in the city in 1800. Cock-fights were a great feature of the wakes. Arnold Bennett described the Burslem Wake in the early nineteenth-century Potteries as a 'wild and naïve orgy . . . towards the end of the Wakes, by way of a last ecstasy, the cock-fighters would carry their birds, which had been called off, perhaps half a dozen times, to the town field and there match them to a finish.'[6]

Bull-baiting was very common too. There was a general belief that a bull needed to be baited to improve the meat before slaughter and certain by-laws actually required this to be done. The bulldog, thick set with short legs and powerful jaws, would try to crawl under the bull 'to seize him by the muzzle, the dewlap or the pendant glands'. The bull would try to toss the dogs with his horns while the owners ran round trying to break their fall with a pole or even catch them on their own backs. If the dog succeeded in getting a hold it clung on to the rearing and kicking bull and 'to all appearance put him to great pain. In the end either the dog tears out the piece he has laid hold on, and falls, or else remains fixed to him, with an obstinacy that would never end, if they did not pull him off'. Flour was used to stop the nostrils of the dogs and force them to let go. Enthusiasm for the characteristics of the bulldog were such that it became a national symbol. Bulls were not only baited, they were also let loose in

[6] K. Thomas, *Man and the Natural World* (1983); S. K. Phillips, 'Primitive Methodist Confrontation with Popular Sports', in R. Cashman and M. McKernan, *Sport: Money, Morality and the Media* (1982), p. 292.

the streets of a town and goaded with sticks in a frantic mêlée of chasing and dodging. The more famous of these ceremonies like the Tutbury or the Stamford bull-running often finished on the town bridge where the 'bullards' would try to heave the wildly threshing creature over the parapet and into the water. If a bull could not be 'brigged' he was spared, while the rest were chased and baited a little longer before slaughter. Bull-running was popular in London. The vicar of Bethnal Green complained in 1816 that the sabbath was disturbed by hundreds of men who would 'enter into subscriptions to fee drovers for a bullock . . . Monday is the principal day: one or two thousand men will leave their looms and join in the pursuit'. So what tended to be a relatively rare occurrence in the country, usually restricted to a special festival, was more frequent in what was already a city of over a million inhabitants by 1800. Distinctions between urban and rural sports were not particularly great, and it is misleading to see urbanization in itself as an agent of change. Traditional sports can be played in modern circumstances, just as old wine can be poured into new bottles. The persistence of ancient animal contests in early nineteenth-century London underlines the point that attitudes are perhaps more important than the physical environment in determining what is and what is not permissible in play.[7]

By the standards of our day the level of violence tolerated in sports was remarkable. This is true whether we look at contests between beasts or between men. Fighting was probably the single most popular individual sport. 'Amongst the pit lads, boxing was considered a manly exercise and a favourite amusement, and I believed I counted no less than seventeen battles which I reluctantly had to fight before I was able to attain a position calculated to ensure respect', recalled William Fairbairn of North Shields in 1803. In Lancashire there was evidence of

> parties mutually agreeing to fight 'up and down', which includes the right of kicking on every part of the body and in all possible situations, and of squeezing the throat or 'throttling' to the verge of death. At races, fairs and on other public occasions contests of this nature are watched by crowds of persons who take part on each side . . . that death often occurs in such battles will not be thought extraordinary.

[7] Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations*, pp. 45–6; H. Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution* (1980), p. 23.

At Pudsey in West Yorkshire in the 1820s men would fight 'until almost exhausted and sometimes women might be seen helping to form rings, and shouting encouraging words to the combatants'. Women were also willing to fight. A German visitor to London in the early eighteenth century met a woman who told him 'that two years ago she had fought another female in this place without stays and in nothing but a shift. They had both fought stoutly and drawn blood, which was apparently no new sight in England,' whilst William Hickey observed two women 'engaged in a scratching and boxing match, their faces entirely covered with blood, bosoms bare and the clothes nearly torn from their bodies' at Wetherby's near Drury Lane in the eighteenth century.[8]

Cudgelling matches were very popular and often played in teams for quite high stakes. Sometimes pugilism, wrestling, and cudgelling would be promiscuously mixed together in a single contest. A favourite form of sport involved a player holding a heavy stick in one hand to brain his opponent, while defending himself with a wicker shield. 'No head be deemed broke until the blood run an inch' specified an advertisement for a contest. Around 1800 the Govan 'rowdy' mob in Glasgow habitually spent part of New Year's Day 'throwing the cudgel for gingerbread cakes' and fighting with 'single sticks', in which the combatants often had one hand tied behind their back. Stone fights were popular too. On a small island in the Clyde a boy was killed at the end of the eighteenth century in just such a fight between the weaver lads of the Gorbals and their enemies from the other side of the Clyde. Stone-throwing was not confined to the lower orders. Up until the middle years of the nineteenth century Harrovians were inveterate throwers of stones. 'No dog', it was said, 'could live on Harrow Hill', and 'ponies frequently lost their eyes if they had to pull their owners' carts near the school'. Fighting in its various forms was part of the everyday life of male youth whether done casually or according to the rites and competitive traditions of village or trade corporation.[9]

[8] S. Shipley, 'Tom Causer of Bermondsey', *History Workshop Journal*, Spring 1983, p. 35; R. Rees, 'The Development of Physical Recreation in Liverpool during the Nineteenth Century', MA thesis (Liverpool Univ., 1968), p. 30; Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*, pp. 26–7; A. Guttman, 'English Sports Spectators', *JSH*, Summer 1985, p. 116.

[9] P. Bilsborough, 'The Development of Sport in Glasgow', 1850–1914, M.Litt. thesis (Stirling Univ., 1983), p. 3; J. A. Mangan, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School* (1981), p. 32.

However, it is misleading to think of fighting merely as primitive or atavistic. The realm of physical combat witnessed some of the first moves towards organized and commercialized sport. It is quite wrong to assume that sport was held fast by the dead hand of tradition until the nineteenth century. As Plumb and others have stressed there was a distinct 'commercialization' of leisure in the eighteenth century. 'Theatre, music, dancing, sport—these were the cultural pastimes for which the prosperous gentry and the new leisured middle class hungered', and which the recent availability of cheaper newspapers and books helped to enhance. Horse-racing and cricket were the main beneficiaries of the changing climate, but fist-fighting or 'pugilism', though lacking middle-class appeal, was one of the first sports to have a written code of rules and a rudimentary kind of national championship informally run by a coterie of sporting aristocrats, London publicans, and patrons of Figg's Emporium, a boxing-hall opened in 1719. Rules were laid down in 1743 by Jack Broughton after an opponent of his had died as a result of a fight. With revisions the Broughton rules regulated the practice of prize-fighting until the last great prize-fight held in England in 1860 between Sayers and Heenan, of which a prominent journalist said 'everything was conducted according to superstitiously observed rules' with 'almost as many ceremonies as at the Coronation'. The regulations against 'hitting a man when he is down', the right to half a minute's rest after going down, and the ban on 'hitting below the belt' were only loosely enforced—a great deal of what we would now call wrestling went on in pugilism—and designed less to protect the combatant and preserve 'civilized' standards than to prevent corruption. Huge sums were wagered on such contests. In 1750 the Duke of Cumberland backed Jack Broughton for £10,000. After getting several blows to the eye he called out pitifully to his angry backer, 'I can't see my man your Highness, I am blind but not beat. Only place me before him and he shall not gain the day yet.' Broughton's emporium was closed in 1750 after this fight, probably on the orders of the angry 'Butcher' Cumberland rather than as a result of the piteousness of the spectacle.[10]

[10] J. H. Plumb, *The Commercialisation of Leisure* (1973), p. 17; J. Arlott (ed.), *Oxford Companion to Sports and Games* (1976), pp. 96–8; A. Lloyd, *The Great Prize Fight* (1977), p. 134; D. Brailsford, 'Morals and Maulers', *JSH*, Summer 1985, esp. p. 133; see also Guttman, 'English Sports Spectators'.

Prize-fighting was patronized by the highest in the land. In 1786 it was said that there were wagers of up to £40,000, with the Duke of York and the Prince of Wales among the biggest gamblers. The nobility often provided private ground safe from the magistrates. The law regarded the sport primarily as a disorderly assembly. In London many of the prize-fights of the late eighteenth century were organized on private estates; amongst the favourite venues were Molesey Hurst and Coombe Warren under the royal protection of the Duke of Clarence. Although there was still intense localism in pugilism, the leading fighters were becoming national and sometimes legendary figures. Jack Broughton himself lived into old age, died a wealthy man, and was buried in Westminster Abbey. The Jewish boxer Mendoza followed him, then 'Gentleman' Jackson took the title after grabbing Mendoza's long hair with one hand and pummelling his face with the other. The exploits of Tom Cribb, the great Regency pugilist, were widely reported in new weekly papers such as the *Sporting Magazine* (from 1793), *Bell's Weekly Messenger* (from 1796), and the *Weekly Dispatch* (from 1801), selections from which were collected first in Oxberry's *Pancratia* and then Pierce Egan's famous five volumes of *Boxiana* in 1828–9. Prize-fighting employed a more or less professional core of men who fought regularly in a kind of circuit based mainly in London. Dennis Brailsford has studied the geographical and social origins of these sportsmen between 1780 and 1824. Of those whose origins were known, 36 came from London, 20 from Bristol, 10 from Birmingham and 6 from Bath with 40 others scattered widely across the country. Pugilism may have been southern-dominated on account of the wintering habits of the aristocracy around London and Bath and because London and Bristol were still the two major ports with dockside fighting traditions. The occupations of pugilists before entering the ring confirm the urban bias of the sport. There were, needless to say, no 'gentlemen' or middle-class persons directly involved as combatants. The age-old link between one form of slaughter and another was evident with twelve butchers heading a list that included four of each of the following: bakers, brewers, colliers, sailors, and shoemakers, and three carpenters, gardeners, greengrocers, metal workers, and navvies. A successful pugilist had but one ambition it seems—to become a publican. Brailsford traces at least a dozen

who like the famous Tom Cribb, landlord of the Union Arms in London's Haymarket, moved from the ring to the bar. Such were the modest but tangible rewards for which men were willing to risk and occasionally to give their lives. Death in the ring was not uncommon despite the attempt to enforce rules, which required a break when a man went down. These 'rounds' were of indeterminate length and fights sometimes lasted several hours. Two contests on one day both ended in death in a field near Birmingham in 1787. Yet this seemed only to enhance the appeal. Crowds of up to 10,000 would trek long distances to see a fight.[11]

Another spectacle that attracted a good deal of popular support and élite patronage was rowing. The demise of professional rowing came as a result of the prestige of the public school, Varsity, and Henley events, and the declining economic importance of the watermen themselves; this had led to rowing being overlooked, although it was a major sporting amusement, especially on the Thames and the Tyne from the early eighteenth century until the mid-nineteenth century. Rowing can claim the oldest surviving fixture in the sporting calendar named after an Irish actor and impresario, Thomas Doggett, whose Coat and Badge became the leading event for young watermen just out of their apprenticeship. As if to underline the links between two sports dominated by large ports, Jack Broughton himself was a winner of this event. Doggett's Coat and Badge was only one of a number of challenge events eagerly watched from the river banks by crowds that often ran into thousands. The earliest record of a festival of rowing or 'regatta' is 1768 at Walton and it seems as if these may have attracted some 'amateurs' in the sense of men who did not earn their living as watermen. By the end of the century there were at least three 'amateur' clubs, the Star, the Arrow, and the Shark, which may have combined to form the oldest and most exclusive of modern rowing-clubs, the Leander, in the early nineteenth century. The adoption of rowing by Eton, Shrewsbury, Westminster, and in the Oxford and Cambridge colleges dates from around 1800 and culminated in

[11] D. Brailsford, 'Notes on the Geography of Regency Pugilism', private communication; also D. Brailsford, 'The Locations of Eighteenth Century Spectator Sport', in *Proc. Conference 'Geographical Perspectives on Sport', University of Birmingham, 7 July 1983.*

the institution of the Boat Race from 1829 onwards. These developments will be examined elsewhere in relation to the emergence of amateurism. The point at issue here is the existence and growth of loosely organized spectator sport before the later nineteenth century. The success of rowing on Tyneside was quite phenomenal. Great Geordie rowers like Harry Clasper were idolized around Tyneside by miners and keelmen alike. Crowds were estimated to run into many tens of thousands for big challenge matches on popular holidays. When Clasper died in 1870 'his funeral was held on a Sunday "to meet the convenience of numerous bodies of working men" and crowds of between 100,000 and 130,000 lined the street to witness the largest funeral yet held in Newcastle'. Purses were raised or held by riverside publicans or from the early nineteenth century in London by groups of enthusiasts who formed 'subscription rooms'. These gentlemen displayed none of that scrupulous disdain for money which was later to mark off amateur oarsmen. They backed themselves in races and wagered on others just as patrons of pugilists or owners of horses would do.[12]

If the popular success of rowing has been forgotten, there is no mistaking the triumph of horse-racing. Horse-racing was transformed from a casual competition between noblemen to perhaps the most highly organized of all sports, regulated by Wetherby's *Calendar* listing a wide range of meetings well in advance. Until the early eighteenth century racing had normally been for a wager between two owners, who usually rode their horses themselves. However, the introduction of Arabian bloodstock, the publication of a *Racing Calendar* from 1727, the laying out of courses near prosperous towns and the formation of the Jockey Club in 1752 combined to strike a new commercial and bureaucratic note albeit under strict aristocratic control. The establishment of the classic races—the St Leger in 1776, the Oaks in 1779, and the Derby in 1780—provided the framework for modern racing, although it is important to remember courses were not enclosed and gate-money could not be charged. Moreover until the railway permitted horses to be moved from

[12] *Oxford Companion*, pp. 759–60; J. A. Cuddon, *The Macmillan Dictionary of Sports and Games* (1980), pp. 652–4; A. Metcalfe, 'Organised Sport in the Mining Communities of South Northumberland, 1880–1889', *Victorian Studies*, Summer 1982, p. 24.

meeting to meeting easily, most events were quite small, annual occasions held in mid-week and dominated by the gentry. As late as 1840 only seventeen out of 137 racecourses held more than one meeting a year.[13]

The Derby provides the single most intriguing mixture of ancient festivity and sporting innovation. Despite the efforts of the Jockey Club to regulate the event, it soon became the excuse for a mass exodus from London. Derby Day saw up to a hundred thousand congregate on the Downs. 'The road to Epsom was crowded with all descriptions of people hurrying to the races', remarked *The Times* in 1793, 'some to plunder and some to be plundered. Horses, gigs, curricles, coaches, chaises, carts and pedestrians covered with dust crowded the Downs, the people running down and jostling each other as they met in contact.' Stories of trips to Epsom and drunken return journeys were part of cockney folklore, polished and elaborated in the telling into a kind of Londoner's *Tam o'Shanter*. In fact, the mass of the 'punters' did not bet on the race at all. They knew little or nothing about the form of the horses, which in any case were often impeded by dogs or spectators during the race itself as there was no properly fenced-off course. So the Derby was partly a 'fair' of the ancient kind and partly a modern spectacle. A corpus of professional jockeys had come into being as part of the new division of labour between owners, trainers, riders, and officials. The most famous of these jockeys was Sam Chiffney, who rode for the Prince of Wales, and was eventually warned off for allegedly holding back a royal mount in order to lengthen the odds, with the strong presumption of connivance by the heir to the throne himself. This happened in 1791 at Newmarket, which came to be established as the centre of the new racing world holding seven meetings a year each lasting several days and attracting the élite of owners and racegoers to the Two Thousand Guineas from 1809 and the One Thousand Guineas for fillies from 1814. Flat racing was now a sprint for highly bred young horses, normally two-year-olds, over a mile or so instead of longer races of four miles or more as had formerly been the fashion. Younger horses and shorter distances made for a less predictable result

[13] W. Vamplew, *The Turf* (1976), p. 25.

and better gambling. Alongside flat racing a vigorous winter programme of steeple-chasing grew up as huntsmen bred ever faster hunters to follow the fox. In 1836 a Grand Liverpool Steeplechase was held at Aintree, and this race, re-named the Grand National in 1847, with its terrifying jumps soon became a new national institution. A Steeplechase Calendar was published by the National Hunt Committee, from 1867 and these events were supplemented by races run by individual Hunts from the 1870's onwards called 'Point-to-Points', of which there were around fifty by 1900 including races for the Stock Exchange and the Bar members who kept hunters.[14]

The first regular references to cricket matches appear after the Restoration. As with pugilism and horse-racing, cricket seems to have been dominated by the nobility who organized teams to play for wagers that sometimes were very large indeed. While hunting and shooting remained the single most important of aristocratic pursuits, this 'leisure class' increasingly had the chance to indulge other sporting interests. Cricket was the first team-game in which the upper classes were expected to exert themselves without the aid of a horse. The landed classes generally confined themselves to the patronage of football and other popular sports but there are numerous references to cricket matches in which famous aristocrats took part alongside commoners. A French nobleman of the eighteenth century would not have considered such a thing possible without losing caste. The English aristocracy was perhaps not only more detached from 'feudal' preoccupations but also so formidably entrenched, so rich, so restricted in numbers that the democratic implications of sharing their play with commoners either never occurred to them or was never a problem. Moreover, their fellow players were often servants whose deference was unquestioned or very substantial tenant farmers—the yeomen of England—rather than agricultural labourers.

The first written rules of cricket were drawn up by the Duke of Richmond in 1727 for the purpose of determining the conduct and outcome of country-house games where a good deal of money might be at stake. These games stimulated the formation of more permanent teams and thus we see the emergence of the

[14] M. Wynn Jones, *The Derby* (1979), pp. 36–7; M. Seth-Smith *et al.*, *The History of Steeplechasing* (London, 1966).

'club' composed of similarly inclined individuals. The early pattern seems to have been for a great lord to act as patron to a village side, which mixed gentlemen and talented locals. The team from the village of Slindon run by the Duke of Richmond may have been the first such club, and drew large crowds for its games against the 'Gentlemen of London' in the 1740s. Although the ball was rolled underarm and the range of strokes played was restricted, there is no doubting the popularity of cricket as an early spectator sport. About 10,000 were thought to have attended the Artillery Ground, Finsbury, for a match in 1743. The most famous of these country cricket clubs was the Hambledon Club in Hampshire, which was founded around the middle of the century by the third son of the Duke of Bolton, and dominated cricket until the formation of the Marylebone Cricket Club in 1787. The home of the Hambledon Club was the Bat and Ball Inn overlooking 'Broad Halfpenny', the village green where the game was played. Hambledon took on the best sides in the country and the lack of modern transport does not seem to have stopped large crowds from assembling. Spectator sport certainly existed before the railway. During the second half of the century there were at one time or another at least 127 members, including 18 nobles, 4 clergymen, 6 Members of Parliament, and 27 officers, with the remainder being made up mostly of tenant farmers as John Nyren recalled in his memoir of his father Richard Nyren, landlord of the Bat and Ball and lifelong stalwart of the club. Some, however, had more humble origins such as Lambert, 'The Little Farmer', who had learned how to spin the ball while tending his father's sheep. On one occasion when his 'jerker' shaved the Duke of Dorset's left stump he bawled out in a broad Hampshire accent, 'Ah, that were *tedious* near you, Sir!', much to the amusement of the crowd. But such breaches of decorum were rare. Although some thought it 'highly unseemly that lords and gentlemen, clergymen and lawyers should associate themselves with butchers and cobblers', John Nyren was at pains to stress 'the style with which we were accustomed to impress our aristocratical playmates with our acknowledgement of their rank and station'.[15]

[15] A useful account of eighteenth-century cricket is C. Brookes, *English*

Beneath this highly competitive level, there seems to have existed a surprisingly dense network of village clubs, especially in the south and east of England, about which we know relatively little. Village cricket is the oldest team-sport to have survived and adapted, still just about recognizable despite rolled wickets, overarm bowling, whites, pads, and a host of complex rules. It is this sense of a continuous tradition, of ancient links, and English pastoral that tugs at the heart of so many devotees today. Using Buckley's gazetteers of cricket references before 1836, Bale has pointed out the southern dominance of cricket with 159 clubs in Kent alone, 109 in Sussex, 88 in Hampshire, and 86 in Essex out of a total of around a thousand in England and Wales. Alongside William Lillywhite of Sussex (the 'Nonpareil'), who stood 5 ft. 4 in. and bowled in a top hat and Gladstone collar, was Alfred Mynn of Kent, born the son of a farmer from Goudhurst in 1807. Mynn competed as a 'Gentleman' in the Gentlemen and Players match, the only representative national fixture, which was held annually from 1819; however, he took money from wealthy patrons and from leading 'village' clubs sponsored by the aristocracy such as West Kent at Chislehurst, Benenden, Leeds Park, Penshurst, and Sevenoaks. Gambling was rife and periodic purges had to be carried out to prevent professionals and gentlemen 'selling' a match. No one ever suggested the 'kind and manly Alfred Mynn' did such a thing, but doubts were raised more than once over the probity of the fourth son of the fifth Duke of St Albans, the Revd. Lord Frederick Beauclerk, who dominated the cricketing establishment in the first half of the nineteenth century; his 'tantrums on the field, unscrupulous wagers and utter lack of what would [later] be regarded as sportsmanship' were a byword. County cricket slowly emerged out of impromptu selections of teams by major patrons where 'gentlemen of the county' supplemented by professionals would take on an 'England' eleven or gentlemen of another county. Mynn's 125 not out in the North vs. South match in 1836, during which he sustained a leg injury that almost led to amputation, made him a popular hero, at least south of the Trent. North of that line cricket was also played with Nottinghamshire's William Clarke the most famous northern cricketer of the age.